United Nations S/PV.6404

# Security Council

Sixty-fifth year

*Provisional*

## 6404th meeting

Monday, 18 October 2010, 10 a.m.
New York

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| *President:* | Mr. Rugunda | (Uganda) |
| *Members:* | Austria | Mr. Mayr-Harting |
| | Bosnia and Herzegovina | Mr. Barbalić |
| | Brazil | Mrs. Viotti |
| | China | Mr. Li Baodong |
| | France | Mr. Araud |
| | Gabon | Mr. Moungara Moussotsi |
| | Japan | Mr. Nishida |
| | Lebanon | Mr. Salam |
| | Mexico | Mr. Heller |
| | Nigeria | Mr. Onemola |
| | Russian Federation | Mr. Churkin |
| | Turkey | Mr. Apakan |
| | United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland | Sir Mark Lyall Grant |
| | United States of America | Ms. Anderson |

## Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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10-58828 (E)

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*The meeting was called to order at 10.40 a.m.*

**Adoption of the agenda**

*The agenda was adopted.*

**The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question**

**The President**: I should like to inform the Council that I have received letters from the representatives of Bangladesh, the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Egypt, Iceland, Indonesia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Israel, Jordan, Mauritania, Morocco, Nicaragua, Norway, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, the Syrian Arab Republic, Tajikistan, Tunisia and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, in which they request to be invited to participate in the consideration of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite those representatives to participate in the consideration of the item without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

*At the invitation of the President, Mr. Reuben (Israel) took a seat at the Council table; the representatives of the other aforementioned countries took the seats reserved for them at the side of the Council Chamber.*

**The President**: I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter dated 15 October 2010 from the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations, which will be issued as document S/2010/533 and which reads as follows:

> "I have the honour to request that, in accordance with its previous practice, the Security Council invite the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations to participate in the meeting of the Security Council that will be held on Monday, 18 October 2010, on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question."

I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite the Permanent Observer of Palestine to participate in the meeting in accordance with the rules of procedure and the previous practice in this regard.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

I invite the Permanent Observer of Palestine to take a seat at the Council table.

In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to Mr. Oscar Fernandez-Taranco, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to His Excellency Mr. Pedro Serrano, head of the delegation of the European Union to the United Nations.

It is so decided.

I invite Mr. Serrano to take the seat reserved for him at the side of the Council Chamber.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

At this meeting, the Security Council will hear a briefing by Mr. Oscar Fernandez-Taranco, to whom I now give the floor.

**Mr. Fernandez-Taranco**: Six weeks after direct Israeli-Palestinian negotiations began in Washington, D.C., we are at an impasse. The parties have not met since 15 September.

On 26 September, despite calls for its continuation from the Middle East Quartet, Israel's partial settlement moratorium in the West Bank expired and was not renewed. Construction that had been frozen resumed in some settlements. President Abbas indicated that he would not continue negotiations unless Israel froze settlement activity.

The Secretary-General has publicly expressed his disappointment that the moratorium was not renewed and reaffirmed that settlement activity is illegal under international law and contrary to the Road Map. He has been in direct and frequent contact with regional leaders, including President Abbas and Prime Minister Netanyahu, and has urged all to find a way forward.

On 21 September, the Quartet met in New York, noted the positive impact of the settlement restraint and urged its continuation. The Quartet reiterated that unilateral actions by either party, including settlement activity, would not be recognized by the international community. It encouraged the parties to work together to find a way to ensure that negotiations continued in a constructive manner to resolve all final status issues within one year.

Following consultations with Quartet partners, this position was reiterated in a message that Special Coordinator Serry delivered on behalf of the Secretary-General to the Arab League Summit in Sirte, Libya, on 9 October. In Sirte, the League of Arab States Follow-up Committee of the Arab Peace Initiative supported President Abbas's position not to continue in negotiations unless Israel freezes settlement activity and agreed to reconvene in a month to assess the situation.

The Quartet envoys have been in regular contact and principals are discussing a proposal to meet soon to review developments. We have a brief and crucial window to overcome the current impasse. Intensive diplomatic efforts, led by the United States and supported by all members of the Quartet, are ongoing to create conditions conducive to the continuation of negotiations. These efforts were made even more difficult by the Israeli Government's approval on 14 October of construction tenders for 238 housing units in the settlements of Ramot and Pisgat Ze'ev in East Jerusalem, contrary to international law and running directly counter to the Quartet's efforts.

Time is of the essence, and we need progress in the coming weeks. The Secretary-General continues to believe that, if the door to peace closes, it will be very hard to reopen it. There is no alternative to a negotiated settlement resulting in the creation of an independent and viable State of Palestine living side by side with the State of Israel in peace and security.

Despite these uncertainties, the State-building agenda of the Palestinian Authority continues to advance. On 21 September, the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee (AHLC) met in New York. The Committee members recognized that the Palestinian Authority's reform agenda had accelerated in 2010, with critical achievements in public finance reform, infrastructure and the provision of social services. They supported Prime Minister Fayyad's determination to implement the Homestretch to Freedom agenda by August next year. The AHLC welcomed Israeli measures to remove some obstacles to movement in the West Bank and to ease restrictions on some imports to Gaza, while urging further steps, particularly in support of greater private sector-led growth.

As a symbol of continued support for private-sector development, which will ultimately drive the sustainable economic growth that is critical to the future State, on 11 October Prime Minister Fayyad broke ground on the agro-industrial park in the Jordan Valley funded by Japan. The park could create 10,000 Palestinian jobs and provide a major boost to the economy. However, as with other infrastructure in Area C, this park will require the Government of Israel to approve the necessary permits.

While in New York, Prime Minister Fayyad briefed AHLC members, as well as Arab League foreign ministers, that commitments of donor funding for 2010 remained critically below what is necessary to ensure that the Palestinian Authority can meet expenses. Reforms have steadily lowered the budget deficit, reducing the Authority's reliance on donor funding for budget support. However, despite the continuing generosity of some donors, commitments for 2010 remain insufficient to ensure that the Palestinian Authority can meet expenses in both Gaza and the West Bank, and the Palestinian Authority faces increasing difficulties in borrowing from domestic banks to cover this shortfall.

There continue to be tensions and violent incidents in the West Bank. The Palestinian Authority is working to provide security in areas under its authority and to meet its Road Map commitments to combat terrorist attacks — and reportedly thwarted attempts by militants to launch attacks during the reporting period, underscoring the continuing security challenges on the ground. A sixth battalion of Palestinian national security forces is currently training in Jordan, with international assistance, before being deployed in the West Bank.

Despite Palestinian efforts, Israeli security forces, citing security concerns, conducted 353 operations in the West Bank during the reporting period, in which six Palestinians were killed, including two leaders of the Hamas Izz el-Deen al-Qassam Brigades allegedly involved in the killing of four Israelis near Hebron on 31 August. Also, 157 Palestinians were injured and 330

arrested. Incursions on this scale weaken efforts to build genuine security cooperation. One Palestinian labourer was killed while trying to reach East Jerusalem through the barrier, and another suffered a fatal heart attack.

A total of 44 violent incidents were recorded between local Palestinians and settlers, in which six Palestinians and four Israelis were injured. One Palestinian was shot by a settler on 8 October, and there were two incidents of Palestinians being run over. In a deplorable act of desecration, there was an arson attack by settlers on a mosque near Bethlehem on 4 October. To defuse tension and promote inter-faith tolerance, six rabbis subsequently visited the mosque and donated new Korans to replace those damaged in the blaze. There were also attacks by Palestinians on settlers, including on 26 September, when Palestinians opened fire at an Israeli vehicle near Hebron, injuring a man and his pregnant wife.

Hundreds of olive trees are reported to have been set on fire, poisoned or uprooted by settlers throughout the West Bank in the run-up to the harvest season. Prime Minister Fayyad marked the beginning of the olive harvest on 10 October by participating in olive-picking in the northern West Bank village of Iraq Burin, which has been the scene of repeated attacks by settlers in past months. Much more needs to be done by Israel to prevent violence by extremists against Palestinian civilians under occupation, and to impose the rule of law.

On 13 October, Israel demolished 10 outposts in the West Bank. This is a positive development, which we hope will be followed by further steps towards Israel's Road Map commitment to dismantling outposts erected since March 2001.

The wall partly constructed in deviation from the Green Line and in contravention of the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice continues to pose significant challenges to the movement of Palestinians in the West Bank. Despite efforts to ease restrictions on movement and access, the number of obstacles in the West Bank remained at 508. On 11 October, an organizer of the anti-wall campaign who advocates peaceful resistance was convicted of incitement and organization and participation in demonstrations, and was sentenced to one year in jail by an Israeli military tribunal.

There were renewed confrontations in sensitive areas of East Jerusalem during the reporting period, underscoring the tensions caused by the presence and expansion of settler communities in the heart of Palestinian neighbourhoods. On 22 September, a Palestinian was shot and killed by an Israeli private security guard in the East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Silwan after he was allegedly attacked by Palestinians throwing stones at his car. Violent clashes ensued and spread to other Palestinian neighbourhoods. On 26 September, an Israeli court rejected an appeal claiming ownership of a building by two Palestinian families in the East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah, leaving a further 20 families living in the area at risk of eviction.

The status of the four Palestinian lawmakers from the Hamas-affiliated Change and Reform bloc remains unresolved. This unsustainable situation needs a sensible resolution that ensures that they are not expelled from Jerusalem.

The situation in Gaza remains a source of serious concern. The modest gains of recent months must not obscure the need for more far-reaching measures to ease the blockade, including enabling freer movement of people and exports and a wider range of goods on the commercial market as part of a broader effort to implement all aspects of resolution 1860 (2009).

If we are to make progress, all parties must work to ensure calm. During the reporting period, Palestinian militant groups fired seven rockets and six mortars from Gaza into Israel, while Israeli security forces conducted five air strikes and six incursions into Gaza. Three Palestinian militants and one civilian were killed, while 18 civilians and one militant were injured. We urge all parties to respect international humanitarian law and to halt violence.

During the reporting period, a total of 2,570 truckloads entered Gaza, with a weekly average of 857. Fifty-eight per cent of the imports were food products. In June, prior to the announcement of the new Israeli policy for Gaza, the weekly average was 566 trucks. However, the current imports still represent a third of the June 2007 pre-blockade weekly average. We reiterate that the appropriate way to meet needs in Gaza is through the further opening of legitimate crossings.

I am pleased to report the completion of 151 housing units in Khan Younis, which on Friday,

15 October, began to receive their new inhabitants. Further approvals of United Nations projects have been received from the Government of Israel. While these are only a portion of the total package presented to Israel, they are nevertheless part of an expanding flow of United Nations recovery and construction work, which will begin to address Gaza's immense recovery and reconstruction needs. In that regard, the United Nations will present additional programmes of work before the end of the year and will continue to work with the Government of Israel to streamline implementation arrangements. One immediate step would be for Israel to expand the working hours and days for which the Karni crossing is open.

The de facto Hamas authorities closed down several civilian associations during the reporting period, including a journalists' syndicate and a farmers' union. Some civic groups, including partners in United Nations-implemented projects, have suspended their operations in Gaza, claiming to have experienced increasing pressure from the authorities. In addition, on 19 September, unknown assailants set ablaze a recreation water park in Gaza. We are also concerned that, on 22 September, a Palestinian man was sentenced to death by firing squad after a military tribunal convicted him of collaboration with enemy parties.

We reiterate our concern over the continued captivity of Staff Sergeant Shalit and call for his immediate release. Humanitarian access to him should be granted without further delay. We note reports of a resumption of efforts to conclude an agreement that would secure his release in exchange for the release of a number of the more than 9,000 Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails.

We continue to support efforts to advance Palestinian reconciliation based on commitments of the Palestinian Liberation Organization. These efforts have been stalled following Hamas's refusal to sign the Egyptian-brokered draft reconciliation proposal. Senior Fatah representatives met with Hamas leader Khaled Mashal in Damascus on 23 September. A further session of talks is expected on 20 October.

As mentioned at the last monthly briefing to the Council (see PV.6388), the Secretary-General's Panel of Inquiry on the 31 May 2010 flotilla incident will discuss and review the interim reports once it had also received a report from Israel. The Israeli commission to examine the maritime incident of 31 May 2010 continues its proceedings, which are now at an advanced stage. We look forward to the continued cooperation of the parties with the Panel and to the Panel's further progress and substantive work.

It remains essential — and indeed urgent — that serious steps are taken to restore the regional tracks of the peace process, in particular between Israel and Syria. Only a comprehensive approach to peace will be sustainable and has the potential to ease tensions in the region. On the ground, the situation in the occupied Golan remained stable but settlement activities continued.

Turning to Lebanon, tensions generated by speculation and allegations related to potential indictments by the Special Tribunal for Lebanon grew steadily in recent weeks. Those tensions were accompanied by a sharp increase in the use of belligerent rhetoric and challenges to State institutions, raising fears of sectarian violence. Against that background, the Special Coordinator for Lebanon, Michael C. Williams, held meetings with Lebanese officials and political leaders and called on all sides to tackle difficult issues in an atmosphere of calm. The Secretary-General expressed his support for the work of the Special Tribunal, stressing that it is independent, with a clear mandate from the Security Council, through resolutions 1664 (2006) and 1757 (2007), to uncover the truth and end impunity, and that no one should prejudge the outcome.

On 13 and 14 October, the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran conducted an official visit to Lebanon, including to the south of the country. The visit sparked serious concerns in many quarters.

The living conditions of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon remained of serious concern. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) continues to face funding shortfalls, both for its regular programmes, aimed at delivering basic services to Palestinian refugees, and for the reconstruction of the Nahr al-Bared camp. We reiterate our call to donors, including countries in the region, to provide vital financial support for the reconstruction efforts, as well as for the work of UNRWA.

The overall situation in the area of operation of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon remained generally quiet. During the past month Israeli air violations took place on an almost daily basis. The

twelfth report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of resolution 1559 (2004) will be released today.

We must remain collectively committed to the goal of a peace agreement within a year from the start of talks in September. We must overcome the current impasse and — more important — ensure that when talks resume they move intensively and definitively to seek resolutions of the key core issues, including borders. The Secretary-General will continue to work closely with the Quartet and regional and international partners — and the parties themselves — to support this agenda.

The United Nations remains committed to an end to the occupation that began in 1967 and to the goal of establishing an independent, democratic, contiguous and viable Palestinian State living side by side in peace and security with Israel and its other neighbours.

**The President**: I thank Mr. Fernandez-Taranco for his statement.

I now give the floor to the Permanent Observer of Palestine.

**Mr. Mansour** (Palestine): I congratulate you, Sir, and your friendly country Uganda on your presidency of the Security Council. We are confident in your able guidance of the agenda this month. We express appreciation as well to the friendly country of Turkey for its skilled leadership of the Council in September. I also wish to thank Assistant Secretary-General Oscar Fernandez-Taranco for his briefing.

Today, we find ourselves at yet another critical juncture in our long, tormented search for a just and peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine — the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict — and the realization of peace and security in the Middle East. There are two paths before us that we must all choose from. That choice must be made with full awareness that the path chosen will determine the future prospects for peace and stability in the Middle East region and beyond.

The first choice is clear: to together seize, with full determination, the significant opportunity that is before us to resume and accelerate the peace process, on the basis of its agreed terms of reference for the realization of the two-State solution on the basis of the pre-1967 borders. With good faith and a genuine commitment to international law, relevant United Nations resolutions, the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet Road Map, it is this path that will speedily advance us towards the achievement of a final, just resolution of all core issues in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, including the issues of refugees, Jerusalem, settlements, borders, water and security, bringing a definitive end to the Israeli military occupation that began in 1967, the independence of the State of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital and a just and agreed solution to the plight of Palestine refugees.

This is the path preferred and supported by the overwhelming majority of the international community. It has been given new impetus by the serious efforts of the Quartet, including with the active engagement and leadership of the United States Administration of President Barack Obama, as well as by the League of Arab States and all other concerned, peace-loving countries. The urgency of pursuing this path is widely recognized as absolutely vital for achieving a just, lasting and comprehensive solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and of the Arab-Israeli conflict as a whole, and for making peace and security a reality in our region.

The second choice is also clear: to allow the intransigence, violations and impunity of one State — Israel, the occupying Power — to not only undermine but to completely sabotage the prospects that remain for realizing the two-State solution for peace. At this critical point in time, it is widely recognized that the status quo in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, is untenable, unsustainable and volatile as a result of Israel's ongoing illegal actions and provocations against the Palestinian people and their land. It must also then be recognized that if recklessly forced down this path by the occupying Power, we will be taken on a trajectory that will bring only more violence, suffering, loss and instability for both the Palestinian and Israeli peoples, as well as the region as a whole, propelling us into yet another era of darkness and taking us further away than ever from our noble goal of realizing a future of peace, security and coexistence in the Middle East.

We come before the Security Council today to appeal once again to the members of this body to uphold their Charter responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. This critical matter must be given due attention, and action should be taken to ensure that it is the first path — the path of peace — that is seized at this moment and resolutely pursued.

Breaches of the law via acts of colonization, aggression and collective punishment against the Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and contempt for the will of the international community must be confronted and firmly rejected. Israel, the occupying Power, must choose either to pursue the path of peace or to bear responsibility for its obstruction.

The Palestinian leadership has for decades been decisively committed to a peaceful settlement in accordance with the two-State solution on the basis of the pre-1967 borders, beginning with the 1988 Declaration of Independence of the State of Palestine and onwards. Our commitment and good faith were displayed once again in our willingness to take part in the recent proximity talks conducted by the United States and in the direct negotiations launched in Washington in September by President Obama, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Senator George Mitchell, despite the less than favourable circumstances in both the political environment and the situation on the ground.

It is well known that the proximity talks were supported by the Palestinian leadership, the Arab countries and the international community as a means to bridge the gap between the two sides on the issues of settlements, borders and security and to reaffirm the agreed terms of reference of the peace process in order to pave the way for direct negotiations.

Those talks, however, did not make tangible progress due to Israel's intransigence and refusal to comply with its legal obligations and the Road Map requirement to cease all settlement activities, including so-called natural growth. Those activities are illegitimate, are unquestionably a major obstacle to peace and are totally contradictory to the two-State solution and the core principle of land for peace.

We reiterate here that the cessation of all Israeli settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, is essential for the resumption of a credible process aimed at achieving the two-State solution on the basis of the pre-1967 borders. This is not a Palestinian condition for the peace process; it is a legal obligation incumbent upon Israel, the occupying Power, under the Fourth Geneva Convention, numerous Security Council and General Assembly resolutions, and the Quartet Road Map. It is also the unanimous position of the entire international community and has been an unwavering demand throughout the years if the peace process, before the process, and even during periods when it has been suspended.

In that regard, it is important to recall the special Security Council meeting on 26 September 2008, which specifically addressed the ever-present problem of illegal Israeli settlement activities and which was addressed by President Mahmoud Abbas, among other high-level officials (see S/PV.5983).

On the other hand, the Israeli conditions now being imposed on the Palestinian side are indeed arbitrary preconditions intended to exact further political gains for Israel based solely on the imbalance of power and impunity that it enjoys and that allow it to arrogantly make such demands while totally ignoring its own long-standing legal obligations and commitments. Such preconditions distort the reality on the ground, distract the focus of the debate from the core issues and have been used by Israel as a pretext to evade responsibilities in the peace process and to sabotage the process, revealing not only bad faith but total disrespect for the most fundamental principles of the process.

Nevertheless, the Palestinian leadership, with the support of the Arab Ministerial Committee, has heeded the international calls for resumption of direct negotiations, on the understanding that our participation would be on the basis of the Quartet statement of 20 August 2010. That statement reaffirmed the commitment to previous statements, including the 19 March 2010 statement, which, inter alia, called on Israel to abide by its obligation to freeze all settlement activities, including natural growth, and to dismantle outposts erected since March 2001. The August statement expressed the "determination to support the parties throughout the negotiations, which can be completed within one year, and the implementation of an agreement".

Moreover, it was clear to everyone at the time that once direct negotiations commenced, the so-called Israeli moratorium on settlement activities would continue for the duration of negotiations or until the conclusion of a peace treaty.

On that point, I must be clear that, despite our very deep reservations about the moratorium — especially with regard to its partiality and non-extension to East Jerusalem, and which we continue to insist must

be a complete settlement freeze without exception — that gesture gave some credence to Israel's stated commitment to the two-State solution and could potentially help to create an environment more conducive to launching indirect and then direct negotiations.

Despite the adverse circumstances that prevailed, the resumption of direct negotiations in September was widely welcomed and once again raised hopes that the political impasse was about to be overcome and that, with serious efforts, a peaceful settlement could be achieved.

President Obama's statement before the General Assembly on 23 September 2010 (see A/65/PV.11) further clarified the commitment to the goal of realizing within one year an end to the 1967 Israeli occupation and the realization of an independent, sovereign State of Palestine, living side by side with Israel in peace and security, as well as of a comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace on all tracks. The strong support of the international community for that goal was continually voiced by the majority of the world leaders who took the Assembly's rostrum. It seemed possible at that time that the momentum and hope generated would not be lost, despite the looming expiration of Israel's settlement moratorium.

Yet, regrettably, none of that was enough to compel Israel to extend its moratorium and comply with its obligation to freeze settlement activities to allow for an atmosphere truly conducive to the successful resolution of all final status issues, beginning with borders and security. Rather than acting in good faith and in a manner respectful of the circumstances and that would allow for the negotiations to be convened, the Israeli Government has chosen to blatantly disregard the global calls to cease its unlawful colonization of the occupied Palestinian territory, persisting with its illegitimate policies and revealing its intention to continue pursuing its narrow, reckless expansionist agenda, at the expense of the prospects for peace and security.

Even a cursory review of the situation on the ground reflects the deplorable reality of the ongoing Israeli violations and crimes in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. Settlement construction and expansion continues, with new and provocative projects being undertaken daily by settlers and officials, who continue to gloat in the perpetration of the crime of confiscating and colonizing another people's land, further fuelling already high tensions and doubts regarding Israel's credibility as a peace partner.

Since January of this year alone, the Israeli settler population in the occupied Palestinian territory increased by 8,000. In addition, fanatic and extremist settlers continue to terrorize, harass and intimidate Palestinian civilians, including children, and to destroy and vandalize Palestinian properties. There has been yet another arson attack on a mosque, as well as ongoing attacks on Palestinian agricultural fields and orchards, with particular malice during this the olive-harvesting season.

These settlers are undoubtedly driven to persist in such acts of lawlessness and violence by Israeli religious and political leaders who continue to shamelessly provoke and incite them with inflammatory rhetoric, racist initiatives and hate-filled and offensive remarks, including from the rostrum of the General Assembly of this Organization.

The situation in occupied East Jerusalem remains most volatile, as Israeli settlers continue to act with aggression against the Palestinian residents of the city and continue to seize Palestinian properties. We have alerted the international community on numerous occasions to the extremely fragile situation in the Jerusalem neighbourhoods of Silwan, Al-Bustan, Sheikh Jarrah and others as a result of the constant encroachment by Israeli settlers in these areas, with official governmental support, as well as of the ongoing demolition of homes and eviction of Palestinian families. None of these illegal actions have ceased, even after the launch of direct peace negotiations.

At the same time, the situation in the Gaza Strip remains critical. In spite of Israel's declared intentions to ease its illegal, inhumane blockade, the occupying Power continues to obstruct the entry of essential goods into Gaza. Barely 25 per cent of needed goods and supplies are allowed to enter, and the obstruction of the entry of construction materials and supplies for industrial production continues, as does the prohibition on the export of Palestinian goods.

The reconstruction process thus continues to be severely hampered, including efforts by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and other United Nations

agencies on the ground to reconstruct destroyed and damaged facilities and to build the schools necessary to accommodate Palestinian children in Gaza — 40,000 of whom were turned away at the start of the school year for lack of classroom space.

It is deplorable that in spite of the incessant calls for a full lifting of the blockade, Israel continues its defiance, and the humanitarian crisis, trauma and instability inflicted on the civilian Palestinian population by the Israeli blockade and military aggression persist unabated.

As stated at the outset, the situation is untenable, unsustainable and volatile and requires immediate redress. The most effective remedy is adherence to the law and pursuit of a peace settlement through an active, accelerated, good faith political process on the basis of the agreed terms of reference. Regrettably, at the moment, this option remains elusive.

Israel stands alone in rejecting the global call to honour its legal and moral obligations, as it continues to carry out illegal acts that are totally contradictory to those required for a peaceful settlement in accordance with the two-State solution, on the basis of the pre-1967 borders. Such actions — which have focused on altering the demographic composition, character and status of the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, further fragmenting its contiguity, unity and integrity and imposing a fait accompli — are seriously, and perhaps permanently, threatening the viability of the two-State solution.

It is thus Israel that is responsible for the critical situation on the ground and for undermining peace negotiations, and it must be held accountable. The international community must act in unison to bring Israel into compliance with the global consensus to salvage the peace process. It is unacceptable for us to waver and change our legitimate position to accommodate Israel's intransigence and unlawful actions, permitting it to continue to shirk its legal obligations to the grave detriment of our collective future prospects for peace and security. Israel should be held accountable and held to the same legal standard as all countries in the world. The preferential treatment given it, which has fuelled its contempt and impunity over the decades, must stop.

The Palestinian leadership has consistently participated in the negotiations in good faith and, in spite of the many challenges, has repeatedly affirmed its willingness to engage in direct negotiations for peace. In addition to our constructive efforts in the political process, the Palestinian leadership, with strong international support, has simultaneously continued its efforts to ensure law, order and security and has been forging ahead with the implementation of the second year of the programme initiated by Prime Minister Salam Fayyad to build the strong foundations and institutions of the Palestinian State in preparation for independence.

At the same time, the Palestinian leadership stands firm in its rejection of Israeli settlement activities. This position received unanimous Arab support at the recent summit in Sirte, Libya. The summit also decided that, in deference to the role being played by President Obama, an extended period of time should be given to allow the United States Administration to succeed in its efforts to compel Israel to cease its settlement campaign and to respect the very basis of the peace process. We remain supportive of President Obama's efforts, and our commitment to peace is clear, but we also remain insistent that settlement activities and the peace process cannot coexist and that one negates the other.

Now, it is time for Israel to decide. It must choose whether it wants peace and security for its people and with all of its neighbours, or whether it wants to remain an occupier, oppressor, human rights violator and aggressor State. The consensus position is obviously in favour of the first choice, and the readiness of the international community to support the parties in seizing the historic opportunity for peace is clear.

However, if Israel once again decides to defy the law and the will of the international community, choosing instead to listen to its extremists and settlers, then it should be made to bear the consequences that all other violators of the law are made to bear. The international community, including this Council, must act accordingly, following through with the long-overdue implementation of resolutions of international legitimacy and taking the necessary practical measures. It must put an end to the exceptional treatment that has been granted to Israel for decades now, which has permitted it to act as a State above the law and to make a mockery of the international community and of all efforts being exerted for a peaceful settlement.

The solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict — the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict — is before us and has been for decades. Courageous, decisive decisions must be made, while recognizing that time is of the essence and that the decisions made at this critical juncture will determine not just the short term but the years ahead for our region.

I reaffirm today that, despite the grave difficulties before us on all fronts, the Palestinian leadership remains committed to peace and to engaging in a credible peace process on the basis of the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid terms of reference, including the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet Road Map.

We continue to strive with full commitment towards the goal of a peaceful settlement of the conflict that will bring a complete end to the Israeli occupation of our land; that will allow the Palestinian people to realize their right to self-determination and to live in freedom and dignity in their independent State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, side by side with Israel and all other neighbours in peace and security on the basis of the pre-1967 borders; and that will achieve a just and agreed solution to the plight of the Palestine refugees on the basis of international law and United Nations resolutions.

**The President**: I now give the floor to the representative of Israel.

**Mr. Reuben** (Israel): Allow me to commend you, Sir, for your able stewardship of the Security Council this month. In my first speech as Israel's Ambassador to the United Nations, I appear before you today and state the profound and enduring wish of my nation to establish peace with the Palestinians: a peace based on security and mutual recognition; a peace that will ensure prosperity for our two peoples.

Peace can only be achieved through direct negotiations and compromise from both sides. Israel has continued to show that it is willing to take bold measures and make difficult decisions in pursuit of peace. To this end, Israel helped to encourage impressive growth in the Palestinian economy, removing hundreds of roadblocks and checkpoints in the West Bank. We took this action despite legitimate security concerns and continued terrorism. With a heavy heart, Israel put in place a self-imposed and unprecedented 10-month moratorium on settlement construction.

We are hopeful that the Palestinians will take the measures necessary for peace. After refusing to engage in direct negotiations for nine months during the moratorium, the Palestinians — who at first belittled the gesture — now demand its extension as a precondition for continuing talks. Settlements are one of many issues that need to be resolved in final status negotiations. History has shown that they do not stand in the way of making peace — as seen by peace agreements that were achieved with Egypt and Jordan. Furthermore, when Israel dismantled all of its settlements in the Gaza Strip, it received terrorism and rocket fire on towns and communities in return.

Israel welcomes the extremely important efforts of the United States Administration to promote peace and security in the region. In this regard, the United States is closely engaged with Israel and other parties to get direct talks back on track.

In looking for a way forward, we must build any future agreement on the principles of mutual recognition and security. A request that Israel recognize a Palestinian State as the nation-State of the Palestinian people must be met with an acknowledgement that Israel is the nation-State of the Jewish people. After generations of conflict, mutual recognition will be essential in overcoming a long history of incitement, combating terrorism and establishing peaceful coexistence between our two peoples. Any peace agreement must also clearly address Israel's security concerns with strong arrangements in that field.

The diverse and dangerous threats facing Israel remain significant. With support from the Iranian and Syrian regimes, extremist terrorist organizations in the region continue to rearm and stage attacks on Israeli civilians. The Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip remains an epicentre for terror and a launching ground for continuous rocket attacks against Israel. In Lebanon, the Hizbullah terrorist organization serves as a constant obstacle to peace and security for all in the region.

Establishing peace will require more than declarations or signatures on a piece of paper; it will necessitate concrete actions on the ground. With this in mind, the wider Arab world must also show Israelis and people around the globe that its declarations of peace will extend beyond words and will translate into deeds.

This body will discuss in detail the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) in a few

weeks, but in advance of that discussion I would like to share a few thoughts about the continued challenges emanating from Lebanon, where radical forces continue to pose a threat to stability in the region. As we approach the upcoming report on resolution 1701 (2006), it remains clear that the Hizbullah terrorist organization continues to build up its military capabilities and armaments, acquiring sophisticated weaponry and missiles from its Iranian and Syrian patrons.

Hizbullah's deadly rearmament endangers Lebanon itself, as well as the wider Middle East. This terrorist organization continues to deploy weapons and build its military infrastructure throughout the civilian villages of southern Lebanon, adjacent to schools, hospitals, houses of worship and residential buildings.

Evidence of this phenomenon can be found in a series of explosions of Hizbullah weapons caches south of the Litani River over the past 15 months. The last such explosion took place in the Lebanese village of Shehabiyya on 3 September. Unfortunately, despite having real-time information about all of these incidents, the Lebanese Armed Forces did not intervene in a timely or robust manner. Furthermore, there is clear proof that Hizbullah removed evidence from all of those sites.

Hizbullah's provocations and continued rearmament must not go unanswered by this Council — which has repeatedly and clearly stipulated that this terrorist organization must disarm and disband — as they comprise a key issue addressed in resolution 1701 (2006).

We also call on the Syrian Government to refrain from engaging in actions that destabilize the region. While Syria claims to seek peace, it continues to support terror. There are numerous indications that the Syrian regime is hosting Hizbullah training camps within its territory, including locations where operatives receive training on missiles and other weapons. This reflects just the tip of the iceberg in terms of Syria's extensive support for terrorism in the region. If Syria genuinely wants to embrace the full spirit of peace, it must completely abandon its support for terror.

Let me turn to the greatest danger facing the Middle East and the world: Iran. The visit last week of Iran's President to Lebanon underscores the destabilizing impact of that extremist regime on our region. Iran's President is a leader who denies the Holocaust, promotes conspiracy theories about the 11 September terrorist attacks and calls for Israel to be wiped off the map; he only advances the causes of destruction and instability.

His regime's support provides a lifeline to the terrorist organizations of Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and Hizbullah, which could not exist without Iran. Relying on those proxies, Iran seeks to foil any movement toward rapprochement between Israel and the Palestinians, as well as other parties in the region. Thus, in searching for a durable agreement with the Palestinians we must also confront this threat with firm resolve.

I would like to note that, while Iran's President and his extremist allies seek to impose fear, bloodshed and *jihad* on the population of Lebanon, there are many other voices in the region. An open letter to President Ahmadinejad that was recently published in the Lebanese media offers an example of one such voice. Let me read to the Council a quote from this letter:

> ". . . you are attempting to interfere, just like others that came before you, in our affairs, where foreign interference was just to use Lebanon internally; the big slogans and the good intentions could not decorate or block the actual truth of this use."

Even more alarming than its continued support of terror is Iran's continued pursuit of nuclear weapons capabilities. Such behaviour endangers not only our region or merely a specific group of countries. It endangers us all and must continue to be met by strong and effective action.

My comments today would not be complete without expressing our ongoing deep concern that for more than four years our kidnapped soldier, Gilad Shalit, has remained deprived of his most basic human rights, including any visit from the Red Cross. Israel expects the international community to do all in its power and more than has been done thus far, to bring about his swift release.

**The President**: In accordance with the understanding reached among Council members, I wish to remind all speakers to limit their statements to no more than five minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously. Delegations with lengthy statements are kindly requested to circulate the

texts in writing and to deliver a condensed version when speaking in the Chamber.

I shall now give the floor to the members of the Security Council.

**Ms. Anderson** (United States of America): I thank you, Mr. President, and Assistant Secretary-General Fernandez-Taranco for your briefings today.

Last month, Israeli and Palestinian leaders took the momentous step of returning to direct talks. The core issues of this long-standing and tragic conflict will not be easily resolved. Direct talks are the path for the parties to reach a solution that resolves all issues, ends all claims and establishes a viable State of Palestine alongside a secure State of Israel as a key part of a comprehensive peace among Israel and all of its neighbours. The United States will continue to be a vigorous and steadfast partner in this vital effort. We are working closely with both sides to allow these negotiations to continue.

We were disappointed by the announcement of new tenders in East Jerusalem on 14 October, which was contrary to our efforts to resume negotiations. We have long urged both parties to avoid actions that could undermine trust, including in Jerusalem, and we will continue to do so as we work to make progress towards Middle East peace. Ultimately, however, forging a lasting and just peace will depend on leadership, vision and courage from the Israelis and the Palestinians.

As President Obama has noted, we have urged Israel to extend the settlement moratorium, which we believe makes sense as long as constructive talks are under way. As we continue to urge Prime Minister Netanyahu to institute another moratorium, we also urge President Abbas to resume negotiations, which remain the only way to resolve the conflict's most difficult issues and give the Palestinians the dignity of an independent State of their own.

We know that many obstacles lie ahead. We know that attempts to move towards lasting peace may be met by rejectionists and terrorism, but we must not let the forces of violence and despair determine whether Israeli and Palestinian children will live in peace or languish in conflict. We must press forward together towards our common goal of a comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace, including a two-State solution, with Israel and Palestine living side by side in peace and security. That goal is in the interests of Israelis, Palestinians, the United States and all those who seek to maintain international peace and security.

Those in the region who want a Palestinian State should do all they can to support the parties' efforts to bring about a just and lasting peace. And those around the world who seek an end to this bitter conflict should support these efforts and do nothing to undermine them.

Let me turn to the situation in Gaza. We continue to view the situation there with concern. Israel's announcement of 5 July was an important step towards improving the flow of goods and material into Gaza. That progress is continuing several months later, and we encourage the Government of Israel to take further steps to expand trade in both directions, consistent with its security needs. All those wishing to deliver goods should do so through the expanded, established channels to ensure that Israel's legitimate security needs are addressed even as the Palestinians' humanitarian needs are met.

Let me also draw attention to the Israeli soldier, Gilad Shalit, whom Hamas abducted in 2006 and who remains in captivity. We call again for his immediate release.

In its 1 June presidential statement on the flotilla incident (S/PRST/2010/9), the Council called for a prompt, impartial, credible and transparent investigation conforming to international standards. We commend the Secretary-General's constructive initiative in convening a Panel of Inquiry that will receive and review the results of Israel's and Turkey's investigations. We welcome the spirit of cooperation that the Panel represents and continue to regard it as the primary and most appropriate method for the international community to review the incident.

Let me conclude by touching on the situation in Lebanon. The United States remains firmly committed to Lebanon's sovereignty and independence, and therefore to the full implementation of resolutions 1559 (2004), 1680 (2006) and 1701 (2006). We continue to be gravely concerned by attempts by foreign players to undermine Lebanon's independence, endanger its stability and interfere with its sovereign affairs.

The continuing flow of weapons and war-fighting materiel across the Syrian border to Hizbullah is a reckless practice that risks plunging the region into open conflict. We urge the Council to remain vigilant

to these destabilizing trends, which threaten international peace and security and the lives of innocent civilians on both sides of the Blue Line.

Finally, let me turn to the Special Tribunal for Lebanon. On 6 October, the Secretary-General rightly and unequivocally noted that the Tribunal is an independent body with a clear mandate from the Security Council to uncover the truth and end the era of impunity for political assassinations in Lebanon. The Tribunal is an independent judicial entity. Its work is a matter not of politics but of law. The Tribunal is fulfilling its independent judicial mandate under this Council's resolution 1757 (2007) at the request of the sovereign Government of Lebanon. We completely endorse the Secretary-General's statement that the Tribunal's efforts must go forward without interference. Efforts to discredit, hinder or delay the Tribunal's work should not be tolerated, and those who engage in them do not have the interest of Lebanon or justice at heart.

**Mr. Moungara Moussotsi** (Gabon) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I would like to thank the Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Mr. Oscar Fernandez-Taranco, for his substantial briefing on the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.

Unfortunately, our discussion is taking place at a time when the direct talks relaunched on 1 September in Washington, D.C., between Palestinians and Israelis is once again at an impasse. Indeed, during the Council debate of 17 September (see S/PV.6388), we all unanimously welcomed the resumption of dialogue between the main parties concerned in order to find a negotiated solution ultimately leading to the creation of a Palestinian State. We believed then in the parties' commitment to overcoming their difficulties, which were numerous, and to pursuing uninterrupted talks until a peace agreement was signed. Unfortunately, we must recognize the fact that the peace process is once again deadlocked.

Regardless of the reasons, the impasse is no alternative to peace, and my delegation therefore urges both parties to resume their dialogue, which is a sine qua non for arriving at a final settlement of the long-standing conflict between them. We therefore invite them to arrive at a compromise on the remaining obstacles as soon as possible.

The Israeli-Palestinian crisis will find a lasting solution only in the context of comprehensive peace throughout the region. In that regard, we fully support the recommendation of the Secretary-General aimed at a comprehensive and negotiated settlement of the various crises prevailing in this region. We are convinced that the effective involvement of Syria and Lebanon in peace talks is absolutely essential for achieving the objective of comprehensive and lasting peace in the region.

My delegation recalls the obligation to respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all States of the region, including Lebanon. We therefore call for an end to the persistent violations of Lebanon's airspace.

We cannot speak of Lebanon without renewing our full support for the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon. We insist on the freedom of movement that it must enjoy throughout its area of operations so that it can effectively carry out the mandate entrusted to it by the Security Council.

Recurrent violence in the region will not, unfortunately, promote the establishment of a climate of trust between the parties, without which neither dialogue, peace nor reconciliation is possible. The language of violence and hatred is the enemy of peace and brotherhood. We therefore invite the parties to refrain from engaging in actions likely to compromise the possibility of a lasting peace not only between the Palestinians and Israelis, but also, in particular, throughout that strategic region.

The pursuit of peace in the region necessarily involves relieving the suffering of the people of Gaza. In that regard, we must underscore once again the need for broad access to the crossing points to Gaza in order to supply the Palestinians with essential commodities and building materials. However, we should not lose sight of the fact that the State of Israel's security is also an essential guarantee of peace in the region. Israeli security concerns must therefore be taken into account in the peace talks. It cannot be otherwise.

Destined to live together and to contribute to the flourishing of the Middle East, Israelis and Palestinians have no choice but to pursue the path of peace together. My delegation would therefore like to reiterate its support for the establishment of a viable Palestinian State living side by side with the State of Israel within secure and internationally recognized borders.

**Mr. Araud** (France) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank Mr. Fernandez-Taranco for his briefing. I also thank the Permanent Observer of Palestine and the Permanent Representative of Israel for their statements. France associates itself with the statement to be made by the head of the European Union delegation.

I would like to make four points.

First, it is important not to squander the opportunity created on 2 September in Washington, D.C., by the resumption of direct negotiations on the establishment of a viable and contiguous Palestinian State living side by side in peace with Israel within secure and recognized borders. Relaunching the negotiations was a brave decision by the Palestinian and Israeli leaders, backed by the efforts of the United States and the Quartet under the sponsorship of Jordan and Egypt. The status quo will only lead to further instability and violence in the Middle East.

The direct negotiations are stymied by the issue of settlements. We have unceasingly reiterated that settlements are illegal and an obstacle to peace. Every day, they compromise a little more the desired two-State solution. In that regard, they jeopardize Israel's security. Settlement, including in East Jerusalem, must stop.

In that regard, the settlement policy pursued in Palestinian neighbourhoods with the support of the Israeli authorities justifies this Council's concerns. Not only is it illegal, but it increases the specific threat of violent incidents in the holy city, with all conceivable political risks. That is why France, the European Union, the Quartet, the United States and the entire international community continue to advocate extending the moratorium.

However, we must transcend that impasse and not lose sight of the primary objective of an in-depth discussion of all final status issues. We welcome the fact that the Arab Peace Initiative follow-up committee has left the way open for a continuation of the process, but progress must urgently be made.

The international community must commit itself to assisting the negotiations. Naturally, France welcomes the United States efforts that have enabled that process to be relaunched, as well as the personal commitment of President Obama and the Secretary of State. However, in order to tackle the task of peace, so often relaunched in the region, and to finally achieve it, broader assistance to that process is vital because it would increase the essential trust between the parties and make it possible to better share the political risks that the choice of peace requires.

When he met President Abbas, President Sarkozy recalled that France was ready to work in that direction, together with the Quartet, whose role is essential, and the European Union, which, owing to its links to and involvement in the region, must also participate. The States of the region have a key role to play by showing their willingness, when the time comes, to turn the Arab Peace Initiative into concrete steps towards Israel. To that end, we are working to create conditions conducive to a resumption of Syrian-Israeli talks, in close cooperation with the United States and Turkey.

Secondly, changes must arise on the ground to create conditions conducive to the success of the negotiations. The Palestinian and Israeli populations must be able to see that improvements on the ground go hand in hand with the negotiations process, in particular with regard to freedom of movement and access and security.

All provocation must be avoided. We deplore the decision of the Israeli Government to launch calls for tender for the construction of 238 housing units in East Jerusalem. There can be no peace that excludes Jerusalem as the capital of both States, as the President of the French Republic said to the Knesset on 23 June 2008. In addition, the Palestinian Authority must continue its efforts to strengthen the security sector and establish the rule of law. The ongoing fight against terrorism must remain a priority.

With regard to Gaza, France continues to call for the immediate opening of crossing points to allow humanitarian access to the civilian population and the development of the economy. France welcomed Israel's adoption of measures to facilitate the entry of goods. Additional steps — such as an increase in the throughput of crossing points, the resumption of exports from Gaza, and relaxing conditions for individual freedom of movement to and from Gaza — are needed for economic activity to resume.

In addition to humanitarian and reconstruction issues, the blockade imposed on the population does not promote positive development of the political situation. Alongside those efforts, we continue to call for the unconditional and immediate release of Gilad

Shalit and for a halt to all violence, in particular the firing of rockets into southern Israel.

Thirdly, the international community's support for efforts of the Palestinian Authority and President Abbas to bolster the institutions of the future Palestinian State must continue. Israel must also resolutely assist that process, including in the West Bank. Token steps have been taken on the ground, but they remain insufficient, in particular concerning freedom of movement and access.

We reiterate our full support for the reforms implemented by Palestinian Prime Minister Salam Fayyad. We share the World Bank's assessment that "If the Palestinian Authority maintains its current performance... it is well positioned for the establishment of a State... in the near future".

In addition to the pledges made, which must be honoured, we have voiced our readiness to organize in Paris, in pursuit of the ongoing political process, a second donor conference for the Palestinian State, which would facilitate the support needed for the new plan to be submitted by the Palestinian Authority shortly.

Fourthly, we are also continuing our efforts in Lebanon. We call on all parties to implement resolution 1701 (2006) and to fully respect the Blue Line. We continue to provide our support to the Government of National Unity, headed by Prime Minister Saad Hariri, but we are concerned about the current tensions. In that regard, we regret the statements made by the President of Iran, calling into question the existence of a Member of the United Nations.

We also condemn efforts to undermine the work of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon. We wish to recall that the Special Tribunal for Lebanon was established pursuant to resolution 1757 (2007) at the express request of the Lebanese Government. That resolution is binding on all. The creation of the Tribunal was a significant step forward in the fight against impunity. In the interests of Lebanon and the entire region, the Tribunal must be allowed to continue to work completely independently, as it currently does, and in peace. No one can or should prejudge the outcome of its work or attempt to exert any undue influence on it.

**Sir Mark Lyall Grant** (United Kingdom): I thank Mr. Oscar Fernandez-Taranco for his briefing this morning.

Peace in the Middle East is a key priority for the United Kingdom. The launch of direct negotiations between Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Abbas more than a month ago was welcome progress towards achieving the outcome that we all want to see: a secure and universally recognized Israel living alongside a sovereign and viable Palestinian State, with Jerusalem as the capital of both States and a just settlement for refugees. We commend United States efforts to bring the parties to the negotiating table and the leadership shown by both sides in agreeing to direct talks after a long pause.

But the process has hit a serious obstacle. Negotiations are now on hold. If there is to be sustainable peace, both parties must do what is necessary to enable talks to resume. We are therefore disappointed that Israel failed to renew the settlement moratorium that expired on 26 September and that settlement activity has resumed throughout the occupied West Bank. The reported approval last week of a further 238 housing units in East Jerusalem is deeply concerning and will only further erode trust between the parties. Settlement activity, including in East Jerusalem, is illegal. It undermines the viability of a Palestinian State and is damaging to the peace process.

We must be clear that meaningful reinstatement of the moratorium, which itself falls far short of Israel's legal obligations, is not an unreasonable expectation. It is essential to keep open the path to peace. Creating facts on the ground makes the necessary compromises harder to achieve. It destroys trust. In the end, it can close off the possibility of a deal entirely. We urge Prime Minister Netanyahu and his Government to demonstrate the leadership required to resolve this problem so that the parties can focus on the considerable challenges ahead. Doing so would inject some much-needed trust back into the process and create a fairer basis for negotiations. We have made this point to the Israeli Government at all levels.

The Palestinians must play their part, too. My Foreign Secretary spoke with President Abbas last week and was impressed by his resolve to return to direct negotiations under the right circumstances. We welcome the significant progress achieved by the Palestinians in recent years on security and institution-building — the foundations of a viable Palestinian State. This work must continue.

But there is also tough work to be done on intra-Palestinian reconciliation. A unified leadership is a crucial component of creating the conditions for a sustainable Palestinian State. Negotiations between the two leaders remain the best way of achieving the desired outcome. Alternative options, some of which were floated by the Arab League in its statement of 9 October, are less than ideal. But it is a fact that those options will receive increasing attention if compromises are not made to get the negotiations back on track, so again we urge both leaders to make those necessary compromises.

If peace is to succeed, it is imperative that there be progress on Gaza. We have been clear that the situation is unsustainable and counterproductive. Israel's decision in the summer to move from a list of permitted goods to a list of specific prohibited items has led to some improvement, but more needs to be done. The United Nations has said that at current rates of approval it would take 75 years to bring in what is required to implement the Gaza reconstruction plan of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. This is not good enough. All parties must now work together to deliver real change on the ground, including by allowing essential reconstruction to take place and supporting the development of the legal Gazan economy through exports.

Israel has legitimate security concerns, and we continue to call on Hamas to renounce all violence and take immediate and concrete steps towards the Quartet principles. The United Kingdom has long called for Gilad Shalit's immediate and unconditional release. It is also vital that Hamas allow the International Committee of the Red Cross to visit Shalit immediately. Shalit's continued captivity, without any Red Cross access, and with only very minimal contact with his family, is unacceptable.

Any solution must involve the entire region within a comprehensive peace, so we are concerned about increasing rhetoric aimed at undermining the Special Tribunal for Lebanon. The Tribunal should be allowed to continue its work unimpeded. We strongly support the Secretary-General's unequivocal statement of 6 October reaffirming the Tribunal's independence and urging Lebanese and regional actors to avoid interfering with its work.

We continue to believe that a negotiated peace in the Middle East is achievable. The international community expects it. The people of Israel and Palestine deserve it. It is up to the Israeli and Palestinian leaders to make the compromises needed to deliver it.

**Mr. Churkin** (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We are grateful to Mr. Fernandez-Taranco for his briefing on the situation in the Middle East. We also listened carefully to the statements of the representatives of Israel and Palestine spelling out their views regarding the Middle East settlement.

We view the launch of the Israeli-Palestinian dialogue as an important outcome of the joint efforts undertaken under the aegis of the Quartet of international mediators, with very active Russian participation. We wish to express our deep concern regarding the decision of the Israeli authorities not to extend the moratorium on construction activity and to resume construction in East Jerusalem. We believe that the resolution adopted on 9 October at the League of Arab States summit in Sirte will allow for continued contact with the aim of preserving direct talks between Israel and Palestine.

We again affirm our position, formulated in particular in the statements of the Middle East Quartet in Moscow on 19 March and in New York on 21 September, regarding the fact that Palestinians and Israelis should strive to find compromise solutions and refrain from unilateral steps that would prejudice the outcome of negotiations and are not recognized by the international community.

It is essential that the Palestinians and Israelis adopt a serious attitude and achieve compromise solutions on all aspects of final status, which will enable the settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on the well-known international legal bases: the relevant Security Council resolutions, the Madrid principles and the Arab Peace Initiative.

We understand that achieving this will not be easy. Differences of principle exist between Israelis and Palestinians regarding approaches to many issues on the agenda. Even though close United States involvement in the discussions is important, it is also necessary to provide collective assistance for an Israeli-Palestinian settlement. Particularly important in that respect is the mechanism for assisting the Arab-Israeli settlement embodied by the Quartet of international mediators, which is recognized by all interested parties, as well as the development of

cooperation between the Quartet and the League of Arab States Contact Group.

The situation in the region remains complex, with surges of tension around Gaza and activity by various extremist forces working to undermine the negotiations process. If a detailed, unbiased investigation is to be undertaken of the tragic events occurring around the freedom flotilla, it is important that an international commission under the aegis of the United Nations be set up and that Israel and Turkey agree to participate in it. We hope that the work of such a commission would promote a general improvement of the situation in the region and that its recommendations would prevent the recurrence of such dramatic events in the future.

One pressing issue still pending is that of Palestinian unity. Solutions should continue to be sought in order to achieve reconciliation. We support Egypt's efforts to that end and send a clear message to Hamas in that regard.

Our proposal to convene a conference on the Middle East in Moscow remains timely. It enjoys the well-known support of all interested parties. If direct and substantive political dialogue between the Palestinians and Israel becomes sustainable, it will create the conditions necessary for the preparation and holding of the conference — of course, following consultations with all interested parties.

In our view, the situation in Lebanon is radically different from that which prevailed in 2008. President Sleiman, the Government led by Mr. Hariri and the Lebanese Parliament have been able to create some stability and to ensure the effective operation of force structures and other State institutions. At the same time, the success that has been achieved needs to be bolstered. Against the backdrop of the complex regional situation, it is important for the Lebanese to pursue the processes of strengthening State institutions and domestic stability, which must continue without outside interference. Lebanon cannot be allowed to become the theatre of score-settling between external forces.

In that regard, we are concerned over attempts to entangle the issue of the future verdict of the Special Tribunal through leaks regarding accusations against individual Hizbullah officials. Our position concerning the Special Tribunal remains unchanged. We believe that the proceedings should be fair, unbiased and free of all politicization.

We welcome the positive momentum in relations between Lebanon and Syria. We view normal good-neighbourly relations between those countries, with which Russia has traditionally enjoyed relations of friendship, to be a substantial contribution to regional stability.

**Mr. Salam** (Lebanon) (*spoke in Arabic*): I wish at the outset to commend Mr. Oscar Fernandez-Taranco for his comprehensive briefing. We support the important role of the United Nations in the settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict in the Middle East.

We have no doubt, Sir, that you share our view that the major feature of the situation in the Middle East is Israel's ongoing attempts to block the peace efforts led by the United States of America by continuing its illegal practices, notably settlement activity, the demolition of homes and the expulsion of their inhabitants, not to mention the collective punishment of the people of the Gaza Strip through the ongoing blockade. The efforts for peace I refer to are the same mentioned by President Obama before the General Assembly (see A/65/PV.11) when he promised the establishment of a Palestinian State within one year and expressed his hope that, when he returns to the Assembly Hall next year, the independent State of Palestine would be a new Member of the United Nations. He also called on Israel to extend its moratorium on settlement activities.

However, the Government of Israel continues to ignore not only the appeals of President Obama and the Quartet and the international consensus on the two-State solution and the Road Map, but also the dozens of resolutions of this Council and the General Assembly, not to mention the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice. The State of Israel has not only refused to extend the moratorium on settlement activity in the West Bank — which did not include East Jerusalem — and pursued such activity uninterrupted over the past 10 years, but it has amended its citizenship law, making it a condition for anyone seeking Israeli nationality to take an oath of allegiance to the State of Israel as a Jewish State.

Furthermore, Prime Minister Netanyahu of Israel has sought to pre-empt the results of the negotiations by setting as his principal objective the establishment of arrangements to guarantee Israel's security by ensuring the presence of the Israeli army on the borders between the West Bank and Jordan and by recognizing

Israel as the Jewish State. Indeed, the amendments to the Israeli law of citizenship and the call on Palestinians to recognize Israel as a Jewish State are but two faces of the same coin and are not only aimed at eroding the right of return of Palestinian refugees and displaced persons, but also threaten the very presence of Palestinians in Israel itself by denying their legitimate historical presence in the land of their forefathers. It dresses up the idea of transfer or deportation as Fascism in new robes, as has been noted in the Israeli media by the most prominent Israel writers.

This is exactly what Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman meant when he said that we must place the problem of the Arabs of Israel on the negotiating table, for there can be no lasting, genuine and solid solution based on a homogeneous Palestinian State without a Jewish presence at a time when Israel is being asked to be a bi-national State. From the rostrum of the General Assembly, Mr. Lieberman said that the negotiations should be based on the exchange of land and population and not on land for peace. He believes that there is no possibility of achieving peace next year or in the next generation and that the only solution is a phased, long-term solution. He thus calls for emphasis on the problems of security and the economy.

In fact, what Lieberman calls economic security and phased peace are pure illusions. Economic security cannot be achieved or sustained in isolation from the political situation. He seeks to delude the international community into believing that the Palestinian economy in the West Bank is growing and that the Palestinians are achieving prosperity under Israeli occupation. None of this is true, for that economy is based largely on assistance from donors, as many representatives around this table well know. The call for phased peace, at a time when settlement activities in the West Bank and the blockade of Gaza continue, will achieve the contrary of peace because it erodes the basis of peace and the two-State solution.

In any case, we cannot imagine peace in any form, shape or context so long as Israel continues to blockade the Gaza Strip and occasionally to bombard it and kill its people under the pretext of fighting terrorism. As a matter of fact, Israel is imposing not only an external blockade of Gaza, but an internal one as well. The most recent report of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, issued in August, notes that Israel bans the Palestinians from using or entering 17 per cent of the land in the Strip, including 35 per cent of its arable land. It also prohibits fishing in 85 per cent of Palestinian territorial waters, contrary to the Oslo Accords.

With regard to Gaza, we emphasize the importance of promptly dispatching the fact-finding mission established by the Secretary-General to investigate — in an impartial, credible and transparent manner and in accordance with international criteria — the attack by the Israeli occupying forces and navy on the freedom flotilla. Such an investigation would allow us to assign responsibility, punish the perpetrators, and compensate all the victims. In this context, we hope that the Council will consider all consequent reports of the fact-finding mission.

Faced with that intransigence and Israel's logic of might, we emphasize that we are committed to the force of the law and that we seek a just, comprehensive and lasting settlement of the conflict in the Middle East based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), the Madrid terms of reference for peace, the principle of land for peace and the Arab Peace Initiative. In that context, negotiations in whatever form must deal with the final status issues mentioned in the terms of reference cited. The Road Map calls for a total moratorium on settlement activities within specified, short time frames. That was emphasized by the Quartet on 20 August.

Permanent peace is a peace that includes Syria and Lebanon and is predicated on a withdrawal from the occupied Syrian Golan Heights to the borders of 4 June 1967 and what is remaining of Lebanese territories, in accordance with the resolutions of the Council, in particular resolution 1701 (2006). In that respect we avail ourselves of this opportunity to re-emphasize Lebanon's commitment to resolution 1701 (2006) in all its aspects. Israel must do that also.

**Mr. Apakan** (Turkey): Let me at the outset thank Mr. Oscar Fernandez-Taranco for his useful briefing.

Last month, the international community overwhelmingly welcomed the resumption of direct negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. Cautious optimism was in the air. There was even talk of reaching a settlement within one year. However, it unfortunately did not take long for the skeptics to be proven right once again. Despite appeals from all quarters of the international community, Israel let the moratorium on settlement activity expire.

For our part, we still believe that this last round of direct talks can be salvaged. Turkey welcomes the decision by the Palestinian side to not withdraw completely from the process and to give ongoing efforts to find common ground some more time. That being said, this pause in direct engagement cannot last forever.

Once again, Turkey, like scores of other States, calls on Israel to desist from taking unilateral steps and employing politically expedient rhetoric that undermine and prejudice the notion of a negotiated two-State settlement. That means first and foremost immediately freezing all settlement activity, including in East Jerusalem, with a view to giving direct negotiations a chance to proceed.

For there to be popular support for direct negotiations and ultimately the realization of a two-State solution, the conditions of occupation have to be eased and a positive environment created on the ground that allows for the State-building exercise in Palestine to make progress. If the Palestinian Authority is indeed Israel's partner in peace, then it must be empowered to assume its responsibilities fully.

We welcome the World Bank's recent pronouncement that at its current pace and performance, the Palestinian Authority is well positioned for the establishment of a State at any point in the near future. For the Palestinian Authority to become economically viable, obstacles to private sector development and sustainable growth have to be lifted. Palestinians need to be able to use more of their land. They also have to enjoy their fundamental rights and freedoms. In short, as the base for a State is rolled out, the measure of occupation must be rolled back. In the meantime, the international community must continue to support the considerable progress already made by the Palestinian Authority in State-building.

On the other hand, according to all accounts, the humanitarian situation in Gaza continues to be grave. By virtue of its illegal and inhuman blockade, Israel is directly responsible for an ongoing human tragedy that is unfolding day in and day out, in plain sight. It is a harsh existence where, for example, teenagers collecting rubble to make cement are shot at on a daily basis. Such is the sad reality designed and imposed by Israel.

The international community must react proactively to the suffering that endures in Gaza. Turkey once again calls for the implementation of Security Council resolution 1860 (2009) and for the full and immediate lifting of the blockade.

On a positive note, Turkey welcomes the recent progress made in talks between Palestinian factions. The existing differences need to be overcome, and disunity must be made a thing of the past. We will continue to support efforts at reconciliation. The Palestinian people need and deserve a single leadership that incorporates all factions and is able to lend its full support to the peace process.

The stability of Lebanon continues to be of paramount importance for peace and security in the region. Tensions have visibly mounted over the past few weeks. It is crucial that all of the actors in the political spectrum in Lebanon remain calm, maintain dialogue and be sensitive to all legitimate concerns. The Special Tribunal for Lebanon is an independent body established by the Council at the request of Lebanon. Its work should not become politicized.

Turkey believes that the hard-won peace in Lebanon must be preserved at all costs, and we will continue to play our part in a bilateral and regional context to defuse existing tensions. In this context, let me also reiterate our full support for the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon. Turkey will continue to call for and strive towards the full implementation of resolution 1701 (2006).

As concerns the attack by Israeli military forces on an international humanitarian aid convoy on the high seas, Turkey welcomes the fact that, based on the Council's presidential statement on 1 June (S/PRST/2010/9), the work of the panel of inquiry established by the Secretary-General is under way. In mid-September the panel produced its first progress report, after receiving an interim report on the Turkish national investigation. The panel awaits a similar national contribution from Israel to proceed with the inquiry.

On the other hand, the fact-finding mission dispatched by the United Nations Human Rights Council submitted its report, which that Council adopted by on 29 September (*See A/HRC/RES/15/1*). I will not go into the details of that important report here. In short, the mission concluded, based on a very detailed analysis of the facts, that a series of violations of international law, including international humanitarian and human rights law, were committed by

the Israeli forces during the interception of the flotilla and the detention of passengers in Israel prior to their deportation. Turkey continues to support the work of the panel of inquiry and looks forward to the establishment by the panel, as soon as possible, of all the facts and circumstances surrounding that tragic use of force against civilians in international waters.

There are once again serious question marks about the future of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. At this time of uncertainty, all parties must exercise restraint and refrain from taking steps that are counterproductive to the efforts to establish common ground and a basis for compromise. In that context, the major new settlement activity in East Jerusalem, announced just last Friday, is yet another step in the wrong direction. Israel must put an end to the actions designed to change the demographics and the social and religious fabric of Jerusalem. It must refrain from any provocative action in the city and preserve the status of Jerusalem, as required by the relevant Security Council resolutions.

More broadly, peace in the Middle East cannot be attained without putting in place a comprehensive framework that takes into account all the different tracks. We call on all actors in the region to act responsibly, assume their fair share of the burden in the search for stability, and give peace a chance.

**Mr. Li Baodong** (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I wish to thank Assistant Secretary-General Fernandez-Taranco for his briefing. I have also listened attentively to the statements made by the representatives of Palestine and Israel.

Currently, the situation in the Middle East continues to be complicated and volatile. The international community should continue to work to create conditions conducive to resolving tensions between the parties concerned and achieving lasting peace. On the Middle East question and the issue of achieving lasting peace in the region, China has always maintained that differences should be settled through negotiation and dialogue between the parties concerned.

China supports the early establishment of an independent State of Palestine living in peace with Israel, arrived at through political negotiations between Palestine and Israel. The direct negotiations that began in early September represent an important opportunity for the peace process in the Middle East. China hopes that the negotiations will continue and will yield substantive progress at an early date.

Currently, those negotiations have been brought to a standstill by the issue of settlements. China is profoundly concerned about this. The direct negotiations between Israel and Palestine did not come about easily. China hopes that Israel will be able to see the big picture and extend the freeze on the construction of settlements, so as to create the necessary conditions for the continuation of negotiations. We call upon Israel to immediately and completely freeze the construction of settlements and of the separation wall on occupied Palestinian territory, including the Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem.

The humanitarian situation in occupied Palestinian territory, and in particular in the Gaza Strip, continues to be grave. That situation should not be allowed to continue. We welcome the recent Israeli easing of restrictions on the access of some assistance in the form of humanitarian goods and commodities to the Gaza Strip. However, it is not enough to alleviate the dire humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip. China calls upon Israel to immediately and completely lift the blockade on the Gaza Strip and to once again allow the people there the space necessary for a normal and dignified existence, life and development. We call upon the international community to pay continuing attention to the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip and to provide greater support to its people.

China firmly supports the just cause of the Palestinian people to achieve their legitimate national rights. We hope that all factions in Palestine will settle their differences and achieve reconciliation through dialogue and consultation at an early date, so that they can work together for the long-term interests of the nation by achieving independent Statehood, whereby the Palestinian people can enjoy peace and stability.

On 13 and 14 October, Mr. Wu Sike, China's Special Envoy on the Middle East issue, visited Israel and Palestine. China is ready to work actively and constructively on the peace process in the Middle East. China has taken note of the efforts made by the Quartet on the question of the Middle East. However, the Quartet cannot replace the role of the Security Council in promoting the Middle East peace process. The Security Council should assume its responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security with regard to the Middle East issue.

China supports the two-State solution, with Palestine and Israel living in peace with one another, as well as the achievement of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East on the basis of the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Arab Peace Initiative, the principle of land for peace and the Road Map.

**Mr. Mayr-Harting** (Austria): Let me first join others in thanking Assistant Secretary-General Fernandez-Taranco for his update on recent developments in the Middle East. I would also like to thank Ambassador Meron Reuben and the Permanent Observer of Palestine for their important contributions to our discussion here today.

Austria aligns itself with the statement to be delivered by the delegation of the European Union on behalf of the Union.

One of the strongest messages from world leaders at last month's General Assembly debate was the appeal to the leaders of Israel and the Palestinian people to be courageous and move ahead with direct talks. As Austrian Foreign Minister Michael Spindelegger underlined in his address in the framework of the general debate and in his meetings with Middle East leaders on that occasion, those talks offer the first concrete prospects for sustainable peace in the Middle East in many years. An agreement between Israel and the Palestinians would radically improve the lives of the peoples concerned and provide the key to a more stable region.

With the expiration of the partial moratorium on settlement construction, we again face the risk of sliding back into a stalemate that would only profit demagogues and violent spoilers. We therefore call on the Government of Israel to urgently reconsider its position. At the same time, we reiterate our call on Israel to bring all settlement activities to an effective halt, including in East Jerusalem. In that context, we specifically call for a halt to the implementation of recent decisions with regard to the construction of additional housing units in Ramot and Pisgat Ze'ev.

We call on both sides to realize their enormous responsibilities towards their peoples and the wider international community, and to continue to work towards a negotiated settlement. The absence of peace for yet another generation is neither a viable nor an acceptable alternative for either side. We urge Israeli and Palestinian leaders to look beyond the political expediency of the day and carve out an environment in which all core issues can be tackled and resolved successfully.

We call on both sides to observe calm and restraint in words and deeds and to demonstrate their adherence to the obligations they agreed to under the Road Map. Both sides should take visible and tangible steps to nurture confidence in the renewed peace efforts. We strongly encourage both sides to capitalize on the positive developments that their cooperation has yielded in recent months, including in the area of security and economic growth. In particular, decisive progress in the expansion of freedom of movement and access in the West Bank and the acceleration of the recovery of Gaza would contribute to building trust in the belief that there is an alternative future of peace and security for the State of Israel and the future State of Palestine, living side by side in peace as neighbours.

It is important that the efforts of the Palestinian Authority to build functioning institutions for a future Palestinian State move forward dynamically. We call on Palestinian political representatives to seriously pursue reconciliation efforts and to agree on a political platform based on non-violence and the quest for peace, democracy and the rule of law. The current split between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip jeopardizes prospects for the successful implementation of the two-State solution.

With regard to the investigation of the tragic flotilla incident, we support the ongoing efforts of the Panel of Inquiry established by the Secretary-General. We look forward to the continued cooperation of the parties with the Panel.

With regard to Lebanon, we reiterate our call on all parties to abide by their obligations under resolution 1701 (2006). While awaiting the results of the investigation into the incident of 3 September in Shehabiya, we wish to underscore the importance of decisive efforts by all parties to ensure that the area south of the Litani River is kept free of unauthorized armed personnel, assets and weapons.

Austria is deeply committed to promoting the rule of law, as this is also a prerequisite for sustainable peace and development. Preventing impunity for past crimes is an essential contribution to strengthening democracy and the rule of law. The Special Tribunal for Lebanon, like other international criminal courts and tribunals, is an important instrument to fight

impunity. We firmly believe that respect for its independence is essential for fulfilling its mandates, and we thus fully support the statement by the Secretary-General on 6 October.

In closing, let me reiterate the deep commitment of Austria, in cooperation with her European Union partners, to supporting and ensuring the success of direct negotiations and to opening all tracks for a comprehensive regional peace. Let me add that we also hope for the continued support of our Arab partners in this important endeavour.

**Mr. Barbalić** (Bosnia and Herzegovina): I would like to begin by thanking Mr. Fernandez-Taranco, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his update on recent developments in the Middle East. We also thank the Permanent Representative of Israel, Mr. Meron Reuben, and the Permanent Observer of Palestine, Mr. Riyad Mansour, for their presence and their contribution to our debate.

In the past month, we have all witnessed the intensified efforts to find a way to continue direct peace talks in an environment conducive to progress. During the Security Council discussions last month, Bosnia and Herzegovina whole-heartedly welcomed the resumption of direct talks between Israelis and Palestinians. We would also like to use this opportunity to reiterate our full support for serious and responsible direct negotiations, which represent the only way to resolve all final status issues and reach a two-State solution.

The resumption of direct talks represents a major breakthrough in the Middle East crisis and a significant achievement by the parties involved. It has also been strongly supported by many international actors, and we must again pay tribute to United States Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Senator George Mitchell, who have played an important role, which reflects President Obama's commitment to peace in the Middle East. The Middle East Quartet and the Arab League have also contributed substantially to this process.

My delegation was aware of the tremendous efforts required from both sides in order to get the negotiation process moving. Unfortunately, we are once again confronted with discouraging news from the Middle East. Bosnia and Herzegovina shares the grave concerns of others regarding actions that threaten the continuation of direct talks, in particular the expiration of Israel's 10-month partial settlement moratorium. We must underline once again that all settlement activities on occupied land are illegal under international law and are contrary to Israel's obligations under the Road Map. Those activities, therefore, represent an obstacle on the road to comprehensive peace. Bosnia and Herzegovina calls upon Israel to respond positively to appeals by the international community and end all settlement activities, including in East Jerusalem.

Still, despite this major obstacle on the road to negotiations, it is our strong belief that their resumption is a crucially important opportunity that must not be missed. The Middle East can not afford a failed peace process. Bosnia and Herzegovina, therefore, urges the parties directly involved to take the difficult and necessary decisions to achieve a just political settlement that should lead to a two-State solution. We would like to underline that we firmly believe that this momentum deserves the continuous and unconditional support of the entire international community, and we are looking forward to a comprehensive political dialogue with a clear agenda and terms of reference aimed at resolving all permanent status issues — including the status of Jerusalem — within one year.

With that in mind, it is important to reiterate that the current situation calls for brave political decisions and practical steps from both sides. It is also of utmost importance that both sides avoid provocative actions that could undermine the success of the negotiations. Furthermore, respect for international humanitarian law by all is vital for any lasting solution and cooperation between the two sides.

We strongly condemn all armed attacks on civilians and wish to reiterate that Israeli and Palestinian civilian populations must be protected. Bosnia and Herzegovina calls for a complete stop to all violence, in particular rocket fire and terrorist attacks.

Bosnia and Herzegovina advocates a comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East, which can be achieved only on the basis of the relevant Security Council resolutions, the Madrid principles, the Road Map and agreements previously reached by the parties, as well as the Arab Peace Initiative. Bosnia and Herzegovina is and will remain committed to the two-State solution, with the State of Israel and an independent, democratic, contiguous and viable State of Palestine, living side by side in peace and security.

The continuation and worsening of the situation in Gaza is of continuing concern to Bosnia and Herzegovina. We recognize positive Israeli activities towards easing the entry of goods into Gaza, but reiterate our calls for a full implementation of resolution 1860 (2009) and for the immediate, sustained and unconditional opening of crossings for the flow of humanitarian aid, commercial goods and persons to and from Gaza, including goods from the West Bank.

Allow me to reiterate our firm belief that only direct, open and frank negotiations can advance the peace process and bring it to a successful conclusion. Bosnia and Herzegovina urges the Israelis and the Palestinians to invest all their efforts to achieve a just, lasting, and comprehensive peace.

In conclusion, Bosnia and Herzegovina recalls that peace in the Middle East should be comprehensive and reiterates the importance of negotiations on the Israeli-Syrian and Israeli-Lebanese tracks. As regards Lebanon, we reaffirm our full support to the Lebanese authorities and commend the crucial role in southern Lebanon of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). We call upon all parties concerned to implement all provisions of resolution 1701 (2006), to respect the Blue Line in its entirety and to cooperate fully with the United Nations and UNIFIL. Bosnia and Herzegovina fully supports the work and the independence of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon.

**Mrs. Ogwu** (Nigeria): I would also like to extend appreciation to Assistant Secretary-General Fernandez-Taranco for his very lucid briefing on the situation in the Middle East. I would like to limit my comments to three issues, namely, political developments, security and humanitarian assistance.

On the subject of political developments, we believe that last month the Security Council lauded the resumption of direct talks between Israel and the Palestinians, facilitated by the United States and the Quartet. Although the resumption of talks was greeted with a great sense of relief and hope, no one was under the illusion that moving the peace process forward would be easy. Mindful of the enormity of the task ahead, we emphasized the need for compromise and flexibility by the parties to pave the way for the achievement of desired results.

It is disheartening to note that in the weeks following the resumption of the talks difficulties have arisen, resulting in a stalemate. Indeed, many had hoped that Israel would heed the appeals for the extension of the 10-month freeze on housing construction in the West Bank Jewish settlements as a positive confidence-building measure. Instead, the Israeli Government's approval of 238 new homes in East Jerusalem announced last Friday will not only enflame passions on the Palestinian side. The decision could also be interpreted as a move to kill the direct talks and thereby complicate the peace process. Coming at a time when the Palestinian Authority has accepted the compromise of a two-month extension on the moratorium, the announcement would have profound impact on the United States-backed negotiations with the Palestinian Authority.

Against that background, the Council, the Quartet, the Arab League and bilateral partners should sustain the pressure on the parties to remain engaged through dialogue. They should also be encouraged to remove all impediments to a negotiated settlement that would result in a two-State solution and agreement on all final status issues within two years.

The parties themselves must increase their efforts in both words and deeds to create the conditions conducive to a lasting peace. Provocative action on either side at this delicate juncture does not serve the interest of peace. We therefore urge Israel to rescind the decision to construct new homes in Ramot and Pisgat Ze'ev.

With regard to security, we believe that the volatile situation in the region remains a matter of deep concern. The series of attacks in August and September that led to the death and injury of several Israelis, including two pregnant women, are deplorable. It is indeed regrettable that a group of Hamas militants initiated some of the attacks in order to disrupt the peace talks.

Reports that Hamas and Hizbullah continue to threaten the peace talks are indeed troubling. There is no justification for actions by either of the parties that contradict the rules of engagement and international war conventions. Soldiers and combatants alike must be held to the highest professional standards. We thus welcome the recent ruling by an Israeli court that found two Israeli soldiers guilty of reckless endangerment and of improper conduct. The use of children or civilians as human shields should not be condoned in any situation.

We hope that Israel's announcement of indirect talks with Hamas leaders on prisoner swap will help to ease the tensions.

While we welcome the marginal increase in the amount of goods and materials allowed to enter the Gaza Strip, we wish to reiterate the need for the complete removal of the blockade by the Israeli Government. The unimpeded flow of humanitarian aid, commercial goods and persons to and from Gaza would facilitate the Palestinian state-building process. It would also reduce tensions and the threat to Israel's security. Indeed, the determination by aid vessels to break the blockade — most recently by the aid vessel *Irene* — would be unnecessary were the blockade on Gaza to be completely lifted. Until that goal is achieved, we call on all aid vessels to avail themselves of the legitimate crossings provided for persons, goods and materials into the Gaza Strip to avoid unpleasant consequences.

Nigeria believes that for the negotiations to have a successful outcome, there must be mutual trust and confidence between the parties. The parties must also abide by and recommit to their Road Map obligations. We call for the increased commitment and involvement in the peace efforts from regional partners to help secure the process. We welcome the support of the Arab League for the peace process and its decision to engage in discussions on the way forward.

The time is indeed ripe for a comprehensive and holistic discussion of the decades of crisis in the region, including the Israel-Syria and Israel-Lebanon conflicts.

**Mr. Nishida** (Japan): At the outset, I would like to thank Mr. Oscar Fernandez-Taranco for his comprehensive briefing. I would also like to thank Ambassador Mansour and Ambassador Reuben for their respective statements.

As we have repeatedly stated, the only way to achieve durable peace in the Middle East is through sincere negotiations in good faith between the parties concerned. We strongly encourage both parties to resume the direct negotiations that started at the beginning of September. We support the United States effort to resume the negotiations and achieve a negotiated settlement.

Japan is disappointed that the Israeli moratorium on settlement activities was not extended and that Israel approved bidding for construction of housing units in East Jerusalem. Japan urges Israel not to implement this new construction plan and to extend the moratorium on settlement activities.

Both parties must carry out their obligations and commitments under the Road Map. We reiterate our call on the Israeli Government to freeze all settlement activities in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. No actions should be taken that could prejudge the final status negotiations. At the same time, we call upon the Palestinian Authority to continue its efforts to improve security and fulfil its commitment to cease violence and work against incitement.

The negotiations should achieve a two-State solution by ending the occupation of those territories, including East Jerusalem, occupied since 1967. Japan supports the plan of the Palestinian Authority to build a Palestinian State within 24 months. Japan will continue to extend assistance and help build capacity for the Palestinian people and institutions for the Palestinian State. I thank Mr. Fernandez-Taranco for mentioning our "corridor for peace and prosperity" project, which we are actively pursuing.

With regard to Gaza, we continue to call for the full implementation of resolution 1860 (2009). We also call for Palestinian reconciliation and support the efforts of Egypt in that regard.

With regard to Lebanon, we reaffirm our support for the sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity and political independence of Lebanon and the full implementation of all relevant Security Council resolutions. We are alarmed by some of the statements made in Lebanon about the present situation, and we call on all parties to act responsibly. We strongly support the work of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon to fully implement resolution 1701 (2006) and maintaining calm in its area of operation.

We also firmly support the work of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon, which is an independent and international judicial entity. The Tribunal should continue to carry out its mandate without any interference; that will contribute to ending impunity.

Japan will continue to make every effort to help the parties achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

**Mrs. Viotti** (Brazil): I too would like to thank Mr. Oscar Fernandez-Taranco his comprehensive

briefing, as well as the Permanent Representative of Israel and the Permanent Observer of Palestine for their remarks.

Once again, the Middle East peace process is at a very delicate juncture. The end of the construction freeze on Israeli settlements in the West Bank, continued construction of Israeli homes in East Jerusalem, the attacks on and by Israeli settlers and the increased exchange of fire between Gaza and Israel are all ominous developments that pose a real challenge to the direct negotiations.

Those disturbing developments must be reversed so that the negotiation process launched on 2 September can continue. That will require political courage and statesmanship. It means halting all settlement activity, as it becomes untenable for the Palestinian leadership to gather support for the talks while the very prospects of a viable Palestinian State continue to be undermined by construction. Freezing construction is not only a legal obligation, but is actually the single most critical contribution to peace in the region at this juncture.

We all understand that domestic political constraints are a factor in any significant diplomatic endeavour and, in cases of war and peace, even a determining one.

At the same time, leaders and parties must look beyond their immediate political objectives and take the measures that are necessary to preserve the peace process and to reach their long-term goals. The commitment of all parties to peace will be judged not by words, but by deeds. One is not asking Israel to make concessions. Israel is being asked to fulfil its legal obligation not to build in the occupied territories and, in so doing, to allow for the negotiations to have a reasonable chance to succeed.

Saving the incipient direct negotiations will also require the active engagement of the international community. We commend the efforts of the United States Administration in that regard. We also applaud the decision taken by the Follow-up Committee of the League of Arab States in Sirte to support the Palestinian Authority in giving some time for conditions to be created for the resumption of negotiations.

Despite the many challenges they face today and will certainly face in the future, negotiations are the only way to achieve sustainable peace, provided they are fair, meaningful and achieve concrete results in the timeframe announced in September. Negotiations for the sake of negotiations do not serve the purpose of peace; rather, they endanger it.

Stopping and preventing violence is also key to sustaining the fragile peace process. Recent incidents of provocation and intolerance are a matter for serious concern. We condemn the attacks against Israeli settlers and the rocket-firing into southern Israel from Gaza. We equally condemn provocation and violence from Israeli settlers and the unacceptable attacks on mosques and on Palestinian civilians and property. Perpetrators of such acts must be swiftly brought to justice. Moving the peace process forward is the most unambiguous response to those who resort to incitement and violence to impose their will, discourage dialogue and undermine the two-State solution.

The ultimate success of the peace process will also depend on intra-Palestinian reconciliation. We welcome the recent developments in the Palestinian talks in Damascus and the constructive role played by Egypt. Positive signs in the right direction are most needed as the effort of institutional capacity-building in Palestine, following Prime Minister Fayyad's plan, reaches a new phase. We reiterate the need for Israel to contribute to that effort by further eliminating restrictive measures.

The rightful focus on direct negotiations must not divert attention from the gravity of the humanitarian situation in Gaza. On the contrary, apart from inflicting unlawful hardship upon 1.5 million people, the blockade of Gaza is also detrimental to the peace talks and inconsistent with a true desire to create an environment conducive to substantive dialogue. We welcome the easing of the Israeli blockade, but what is required is a complete lifting of the blockade, without prejudice to Israel's legitimate security concerns.

At this critical point in time, there are fundamental choices to be made by the parties, in particular by the strongest one. As the Secretary-General recently and eloquently stated, if the door to peace closes, it will be very hard to reopen. We hope and expect that his important message will be understood and heeded.

Before I conclude, let me add a few words on Lebanon. We encourage all Lebanese to work together towards political stability and prosperity. We urge all

parties to address their differences peacefully. The international community should also continue to extend its full support to the country, especially through efforts to assist Lebanon in promoting justice while consolidating peace and reconciliation.

**Mr. Heller** (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Mr. Fernandez-Taranco for the briefing he has given us, as well as the representatives of Israel and the Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine for their statements.

For decades, the international community has witnessed wars, tension and violence in the Middle East, quite often without having the capacity to respond, hoping that some day the conflict would finally end and give way to peaceful coexistence between those nations. At present, no efforts are being spared to achieve that goal. The United Nations and various States, both from within and outside the region, have been resolutely involved in this complex task.

The situation is quite different from that which prevailed 60 years ago. Peace agreements have been signed, the existence of the State of Israel has been recognized by the vast majority of the international community and dialogue has been established between the main parties involved, namely, Israelis and Palestinians. On occasion, that dialogue has substantive; at times, it has been a dialogue of the deaf.

However, the conflict persists, and we have not achieved the objective that would make it possible to resolve the conflict once and for all, that is, the creation of a sovereign and independent Palestinian State that is politically and economically viable and living in peace side by side with Israel within secure and internationally recognized borders.

At the beginning of September, thanks to the efforts of President Obama's Administration, hopes for peace were once again rekindled owing to the restoration of direct dialogue between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, supported by the Quartet, the Arab League and the international community. The goal is ambitious: to resolve all the central issues within a year. All the relevant stakeholders have become involved in that task, with the firm goal of giving shape to the so-called two-State solution. They all knew that there would obstacles, threats and risks, but were determined to become involved in the process sincerely and seriously.

Today, ongoing dialogue hangs from a thread, and the process of rapprochement seems to be slipping backwards. This situation is not acceptable. Dialogue and negotiation must continue and must produce tangible results for the Palestinians and the Israelis. The status quo is not a viable alternative. It will only exacerbate tensions and lead to greater violence and confrontation, directly affecting the civilian population and destabilizing the region.

The international community also has a role to play in restoring substantive and direct dialogue between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, not only because the alternative to dialogue is more violence, but because we truly believe in the need for the Palestinian people to have a sovereign and independent State. This was established by the Quartet in its statement of 19 March and in subsequent statements, and it has been recognized by the vast majority of Member States of the Organization.

But perhaps the most decisive factor will be when both parties abstain from carrying out provocative acts or acts that run counter to their obligations under the Road Map. Israel and the Palestinian Authority must create a context that is conducive to negotiations. In that regard, the resumption of construction in illegal settlements in the West Bank and the announcement of new construction in East Jerusalem are a serious step backwards. The international community has been unanimous on this point: settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories are illegal, run counter to international law and are a serious obstacle to the peace process, as they prejudge and alter the results of the negotiations.

Contrary to what some think, settlements do not provide for greater security. On the contrary, they generate tension, resentment and violence between the two peoples, as we have seen in the past few weeks and over the years. We urge Israel to cease this practice once and for all, including the so-called natural growth. This would confirm its commitment to the peace process.

The Palestinian Authority must also continue to meet its commitments under the Road Map. Despite the tragic attacks against Israeli civilians, which we have firmly condemned, we have noted with satisfaction the improved capacities of Palestinian security forces, as well as a gradual improvement in the economic situation of the West Bank.

We cannot think about improving the living conditions of the Palestinians without considering the civilian population in Gaza. The blockade imposed on Gaza is unsustainable and counter-productive and has severe humanitarian consequences for the civilian population of the Gaza Strip. The partial lifting of restrictions is welcome, but it is insufficient. The blockade must be completely lifted, and, as we have continued to state since January 2009 and taking account of the legitimate security concerns of Israel, we believe that this will only be possible if an international monitoring mechanism is set up which will guarantee a lasting ceasefire, the complete openness of border crossings and control of illicit weapons trafficking to Gaza, in accordance with Security Council resolution 1860 (2009). This will also lead to a significant reduction in tension and deaths resulting from this situation, such as the attack on the Freedom flotilla on 31 May.

We trust that the Panel of Inquiry established by the Secretary-General will clarify the events that took place during that incident, and we reiterate the primacy of international norms. An investigation must be carried out, as stated in the Council's presidential statement (S/PRST/2010/9), and it must be prompt, impartial, credible and transparent. We await the early outcome of the investigations under way. It is also essential that inter-Palestinian dialogue continue, as facilitated by Egypt and other States involved.

Assessing the situation in the Middle East requires that we take into account the regional situation. We have noted with concern an increase in inter-community tensions in Lebanon, which endangers the political balance and coexistence among the various factions within Lebanese political society and has led to ongoing violations of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006), in particular through the caching of weapons and explosives in the areas of operation of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon, as well as daily incursions by Israeli armed forces into Lebanon's territory. We appeal both to Israel and to Lebanon, as well as to other relevant political stakeholders, to comply with the provisions of Security Council resolutions and to avoid any belligerent rhetoric that could lead to an escalation in violence.

Moreover, the work of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon has generated increased tension and controversy in the region. As pointed out by the Secretary-General on 6 October, the Tribunal is an independent body with a clear Security Council mandate to end impunity in an extremely serious case. Its conclusions must not be prejudged, and there must be no interference with its work.

The time has come for the leaders of Israel and the Palestinian Authority to take important but difficult political decisions to benefit their own people as well as to ensure international peace and stability. The situation requires political will, which has been lacking so far.

We appeal to Israel and to the Palestinian Authority to demonstrate through tangible actions, their determination to resolve this conflict in a way that goes beyond provocation and short-term political interests.

**The President**: In view of the lateness of the hour, Uganda will be the last speaker of the morning. I propose to resume the meeting at 3 p.m. this afternoon in order to listen to the other speakers on the list.

I shall now make a statement in my capacity as representative of Uganda.

I thank Mr. Fernandez-Taranco, Assistant Secretary-General for his comprehensive briefing. I also thank the representatives of Israel and Palestine for their statements.

It is a matter of concern to my delegation that the situation in the Middle East remains tense and fragile. We were encouraged by the commencement of direct negotiations between Israel and Palestine last month. It is essential that the two parties uphold their commitment to work towards a framework for permanent peace.

There is no doubt that this negotiation process will require courageous decisions and concessions by both parties. Uganda is convinced that a comprehensive and durable peace lies in a two-State solution: Israel and Palestine living side by side in peace and security. In this regard, we commend the efforts undertaken by the international and regional partners in facilitating the negotiations.

We salute the efforts of the Palestinian Authority to fulfil their obligations under the Road Map, particularly in the security sector, in institution-building and in economic development. We, however, remain concerned about divisions among the

Palestinians and call upon them to resolve their differences through dialogue.

The continued settlement activity by Israel in East Jerusalem is a recipe for conflict, which is a matter of serious concern. We call upon Israel to freeze all settlement activity, including natural growth. We are also concerned over the continued rocket attacks from Gaza into Israel, as well as Israeli air strikes into Gaza. We call on both sides to exercise maximum restraint and adhere to the ceasefire as envisaged in resolution 1860 (2009).

While the easing of the blockade on Gaza by Israel is a positive step, we call for the total lifting of the blockade.

On Lebanon, we are concerned about the continued violations of resolution 1701 (2006). We call on all parties to fully implement that resolution.

I resume my function as President of the Council. As indicated earlier, I intend, with the concurrence of Council members, to suspend the meeting until 3 p.m.

*The meeting was suspended at 1.20 p.m.*